

An Essay on
~ The Physician ~

Respectfully submitted
to the Faculty of the
Homoeopathic Medical College
of
~ Pennsylvania ~
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of Alabama

In writing a brief essay upon the subject selected, I shall not assist in disturbing the ashes of the illustrious dead, by singing psalms to their glory, or by indulging in Sophomorical allusions to their greatness; but simply confine myself, to a description of the modern Physician, his Character, duties, responsibility social position &c; feeling however great inability to do justice to the portraiture.

From the earliest ages, the Physician, has occupied an important and exalted position; nor has his sphere of action been circumscribed by limitation, to any particular grade of society. Being placed near Sovereigns he not only has power over the lives of Emperors and Kings, but by its exercise, may determine the destinies of Nations. And looked upon as he is with confidence, through the descend

ing grades, we at once see the importance of the question; What should be his character? without much conjecture we arrive at the conclusion, that it should be, *sans reproche*,

As his profession is one among the most honorable, - if not the most honorable, that man can follow, for who has more important trusts than he? he holds the lives of his fellow creatures in his hands, being entrusted with the restoration of the diseased, to a state of health; and he is moreover the guardian of health. For it is as much his duty to prevent, sickness, when in his power, as its removal by curative means. He should therefore possess the highest sense of honor, and be in every acceptation of the word a Philanthropist. He should be mo-

ral, and for probity and sobriety unimpeachable.

The Physician, in his intercourse with society, should be kind and gentle, possessing much of the "Suaviter in modo", yet mingled with a sufficient degree of firmness, to enforce his directions, and ensure obedience to his injunctions.

Discretion of course should be one of his attributes as confidence is reposed in him.

His education should be excellent. His mind being not merely well stored with medical lore, which can only be attained by years of study and observation, but with varied and general information,

A knowledge of the world is also requisite, not the prosaic knowledge, gained by contact with those among whom we are thrown, learned from what we style, human nature, and

which enables us to take advantage of the foibles, and ignorance, of others, for self-aggrandisement; but he should be well versed in polite literature, so ornate to the gentleman, for there is no profession which requires more in its followers the polished gentleman, than that of medicine. Therefore his manner should be that which such an education would confer, courteous and elegant, with politeness a characteristic.

But how often do we see the opposite of this in the Physician, Indeed a degree of coarseness disagreeable to any one, and particularly disgusting to the invalid, who appreciates so fully, kindness and gentleness in his medical attendant, being exceedingly sensitive to such deportment.

Besides his professional duties, there

are very many seemingly little attentions, kindly, and unobtrusively bestowed by the Physician, which tend to gain the respect and gratitude, and in many instances the love of patients and friends. And by acting in this manner, he may extend very largely his sphere of usefulness, and prove to him a source of pleasure and profit; for many have succeeded by such auxiliary means, who would not otherwise have attained any position in their profession.

The young Physician goes forth into the world, — and as it is generally among strangers that he sojourns, — with scarce any reputation, except the certificate of ^{ability} received from his Alma Mater, leaving his own character to form, how extremely careful should he then be, to base it firm

ly, for upon it alone depends success.

With a good moral foundation, he can rear a beautiful superstructure, adorned with the graceful outlines of gentleness, kindness and politeness.

He should endeavor to encircle himself with the impenetrable armor of honor, a safeguard against the entrance of all assaunting vices, nor should the glitter of gold be allowed to tarnish its brighter, nobler lustre; thus accoutred he may do battle with the world, wielding the weapons of truth.

Avoiding all dissensions, he should identify himself with no party, but as the public servant, serve the public. By such a course of conduct he will command the respect of all and gain his re-

ward.

It is much to be lamented, that within the ranks of the profession, there is so much dissension. It is true that when there are any great truths involved, there is generally more or less disagreement: but apart from praiseworthy emulation to arrive at truth, we see much division.

While some blindly follow in the footsteps of their masters, others oppose all established authority; some ride a hobby, while others again, promulgate new theories, generally absurd, not for the benefit of suffering humanity, but individual aggrandizement; and alas! how many have fallen victims to empiricism so rash, and quackery so barborous.

But although these schisms, and an-

tagonistic theories, have their effect upon the community - their advocates, "Strut but their brief hour upon the stage"; and their teachings do not militate, against the science, (if it may so be called) of medicine, which stands nevertheless preeminent among the professions.

The Physician should divest himself of all habits and practices unpleasant to others, for they can generally be very easily displeased with, and to his decided advantage, In our own country the use of tobacco, is a most common and disagreeable habit, - so injurious to the consumer, and particularly disgusting to the delicate sensibility of females, who constitute by far the larger portion of patients.

Peculiarity of dress should never distin-

-guish the Physician, but he should be characteristically unassuming and neat.

The duties of the Physician are varied and onerous, yet he should never shrink from the performance of them, though they interfere with his comfort, and even greater sacrifices be the result.

He should at all times obey the call for his services; allowing no selfish motive to interfere with, or prevent his ready obedience to the mandates of duty however unpleasant it may be.

As the warrior, who nobly risks his life for the honor of his country, so the Physician, should firmly meet the enemy disease, rather than by flying from its contagion, prove equally the traitor and coward, with him, who

deserts his country's standard or flies before his foe man.

It is far nobler to remain with the stricken amidst a ruthless epidemic, alleviating their sufferings, and cheering their decline, not knowing what hour the insidious foe may claim you for its victim; than to go forth with pomp for a cause, though it may be just, and brave death amid general carnage; and whether you escape the fell destroyer, or be numbered among its slain, the reward, — an approving consciousness of duty performed, will be great; if not made known to the world, by songs of triumph, personal decorations, or monumental inscriptions.

The Physician, may oftentimes be called

upon for his services, when he is aware that they are not needed, yet he may feel it his duty to respond, and at personal inconvenience, for it is much to be lamented that there are so many afflicted, with peculiarities of temperament, and with minds diseased, the result of education, idolence, or the effect of calamity or misfortune, who are the subjects of multifarious, imaginary bodily ills.

For the Physician to take advantage of such idiosyncrasy, to increase his gains, would be highly discreditable and condemnatory; but yet it may in very many cases, be his duty to humour the whims of such, who are thus unfortunate, until he can convince them of the fallacy of their

fears, and erroneous ideas of illness, and that his medicine will be beneficially superseded, by needed exercise and employment. By such treatment, many are relieved from long suffering of self-inflicted misery, and annoyance to all about them, while but few, or none are benefited by ridicule or neglect;

Other cases occur that extremely perplex the Physician, and yet, they should not; his aid being often sought for the purpose of suppressing shame, and avoiding guilty exposure; and again, - strangely enough, - by those who have no reason for concealment, but for some selfish end act in direct violation of Divine will.

There not only a question of duty is involved, but also of honor and mo-

vality; and with this triple guard, he should be able to resist all appeals, and not only refuse his assistance to aims so diabolical; but zealously dissuade from recourse to others, whose morality would not interfere with their desire for gain, - and unfortunately there are many such, - by truthfully exhibiting the danger of such proceedings, and pointing out their wickedness and sin.

Only should such means as abortion be resorted to, in extreme cases, where there exists some irresistible obstacle to parturition, and the safety of the mother be involved. if gestation were allowed consummation, and then only after deliberate consultation, for being always attended with danger, the Physician in such cases ^{should never} act upon his own responsibility.

Unfortunately there are many who bear the name of Physician; who, when called in professionally, paint the disease, - although they are aware to the contrary, - as exceedingly severe. Such persons must have easily satisfied consciences, whether by multiplied visits they increase their fee, or by effecting a cure, gain professional éclat, by thus indirectly trumpeting their own fame. Such practices cannot be too severely condemned or deprecated.

The Physician has many disagreeable duties to perform; and among them is the sad information, to the patient and friends that he must prepare for death, but when he is convinced that such must be the result, he should not too long withhold the mournful tidings, but gently communicate the fact and endeavor as much as in his power to

sooth and relieve by kindness and remedial agencies, the remaining period of life and secure a peaceful exit of the spirit from the suffering flesh.

Nor should he ever raise false hopes, in the bosoms of relatives and friends, from sympathy, with their grief, even when he is in much doubt as to the termination, but prepare them to meet the fatal event if apprehended, with resignation, for it not unfrequently happens, when the intimate ties of relationship and love are thus suddenly severed, by the intervention of death, that the surviving are more to be mourned than the dead.

The responsibility of the Physician is every great; being entrusted as it were with the lives of his fellow creatures: those who

fore who bestow legality upon practitioners, should be very careful that they do not invest such power in the hands of the ignorant.

Besides the great moral responsibility, hanging over the Physician, he is amenable to the laws of his country for malpractice, whether it be the result of ignorance, carelessness or accident.

He should possess knowledge, with sound judgement; energy of action, with decision to meet any emergency, Carelessness or neglect in him is unwarrantable, and should be rigorously visited with punishment.

Upon the surgical part of practice do prosecutions for malpractice more frequently fall, and not always undeservedly; for the skillful operator will often

expedite the termination of disease by extirpation or amputation, when a cure may be effected in time, by remedial measures, without resorting to the use of the knife, thus preventing maiming or the loss of a member, which can never be replaced, however perfectly art may imitate nature.

Sometimes it happens, and not unfrequently, that decisions are given against the Physician, unjustly, and he only had recourse to capital, or other operations as a dernier resort; for in such prosecutions, public opinion is generally unfavorable to him, and professional witnesses are readily procured to testify that the operation was premature, or unnecessary. Therefore he

should in such extremity, seek counsel, if possible to be obtained, and not rely upon his own judgement, it would also be sufficient testimony to controvert, any undue advantage which might be taken by designing persons. In this age such things occur but too frequently, and the independence of the Physician is sadly compromised; yet probably it may have a good effect, in inducing him to be more cautious.

The great moral responsibility attendant upon the profession of medicine, is not burdensome to the honorable Physician; as he would never take advantage of his knowledge, for other than a praise-worthy object; all his actions being guided by truth, and performed

in sincerity,

Notwithstanding the great responsibility, and onerous duties which surround the Physician; yet it being a life of usefulness, if his duties, are, correctly performed, it cannot fail to be satisfactory; and it depends much if not entirely upon himself as to its profits and its pleasures,

"*Quisquæ suæ fortunæ faber*"

If fame be his desire, he may rise to distinguished eminence; or otherwise quietly extend his sphere of usefulness, making his knowledge subservient to the public good.

The social position of the Physician is generally of an agreeable nature. He is a welcome visitor at the mansion of the wealthy, and the cottage of the poor, and is appealed to, not only for relief from pain and prostration, but for advice and comfort,

He always finds a place at the hospitable board and friendly hearth, and being regarded with entire confidence, he is almost considered as of the family circle. He should be happy in being the means of alleviating the racking pain, restoring to strength, the body exhausted by disease, or even, in assuaging the pangs of death, or comforting the bereaved.

In his social relations the Homoeopathic Physician, has much the advantage of all others. He comes with no nauseous drugs, torturing blisters, or frightening lancet; but combatting disease with pleasant, and effectual remedies, he is joyfully welcomed; and children evincing no terror at his approach, group around him with love.

Having it so much in his power to conciliate friendships, his lot at least should

be a pleasant one; and as his science advances to perfection, more easily can he overcome his opponents, and obliterate the prejudices existing against his profession, which are now rapidly fading away. For the Allopathic Physician in comparison to him, is like the strong man, endeavoring by main force unsuccessfully to move an opposing obstacle; while he, with the lever in his hands, overcomes the difficulty, with scarcely perceptible effort.

